



*A Member of America's Second Harvest*  
450 Woodland Ave, Bloomfield, CT 06002-1342  
Phone (860) 286-9999 Fax (860) 286-7860  
On the web: <http://www.foodshare.org>

## **Testimony Regarding Deficit Mitigation Plan**

Connecticut General Assembly

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Presented by:

Sarah Santora, Community Involvement Coordinator, Foodshare

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Santora and I am here representing Foodshare, the Hartford area's regional food bank. Foodshare is the heart of greater Hartford's anti-hunger network and provides food to nearly 350 local organizations that are feeding people in need. As you can imagine, the needs at local food pantries have been growing dramatically in the current economic climate – on average 30% more people are seeking help with food for their families than last year.

The proposed cut of \$22,000 to the Nutrition Assistance Program may not seem like much, but in light of the rising numbers of people needing assistance, any cut to a food program is too much!

Hunger is a problem throughout Connecticut. There is now at least one private agency providing food to people in need in every town in the greater Hartford region and over 500 such local agencies around our state.

Last year, Foodshare distributed 11 million pounds of food to 400 local organizations that feed hungry people right here in the greater Hartford area. This is about 15 tons of food each and every day of the year, more than a tractor-trailer load of food getting out to people in need every single day!

Some people hear about Foodshare, and think, "Wow, the private sector can take care of the problem of hunger." I'm here to tell you first and foremost -- that is wrong! Yes, 11 million pounds of food per year is a lot of food. But through our partner agencies, Foodshare serves 100,000 people in greater Hartford each year. You can do this math in your head. 11 million pounds of food divided up among 100,000 people works out to about 110 pounds of food per person per year. About two pounds of food per week, when most of us eat about a pound of food each and every time we sit down for a meal. Foodshare could double or triple in size and it still would not be enough!

None of us at Foodshare would suggest that Foodshare should double or triple in size or even that it's possible. Private charities do not have enough food, enough volunteers, or enough money to end hunger in our midst.

We believe that ensuring that everyone has access to enough nutritious food to sustain themselves and lead healthy and productive lives is the responsibility of the entire community – government and charities, individuals and organizations. We in the private, charitable sector need government to do its share if we are to end hunger in Connecticut.

One way the state makes a difference in this effort is with the Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides needed dollars for the state's two food banks to purchase high protein foods to supplement the donations received from the food industry. Since the program's inception in 1988, it has operated with an annual budget of about \$400,000. Because of the increasing number of agencies taking part in the program and the rapidly rising cost of food, each community kitchen or food pantry in the state gets significantly less food from this program than they did ten years ago. This at a time when demand has risen every year, and risen dramatically this past year.

This reality makes it like the program has already taken a substantial cut – each food pantry and community kitchen gets far less food from this program than they did in the past.

Many of our neighboring states are way ahead of us. In Massachusetts, they fund their state food purchase program at \$12 million, New York appropriates \$24.5 million, New Jersey \$4 million, and Pennsylvania \$18.75 million. Even with current budget conditions, New York recently found room to expand this important program to help meet people's basic needs in difficult times.

Although we recognize the difficulties in this year's budget, we urge you to look at any ways to increase the funding for food purchase, rather than the proposed decrease. Remember that every penny of these funds goes directly to the purchase of high-nutrition food for the poorest of our neighbors in Connecticut.